



Aalto University
School of Business

Mikkeli Campus

SUCCESS FACTORS OF CITY BRANDS – A MILLENNIAL PERSPECTIVE

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International Business
Bachelor's Thesis
Instructor: Maria Elo
Date of submission: 9 April 2018

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Objectives

The main objectives of this study were to research factors contributing to the success of city brands and the formation of the city brand image to understand city brand components and develop suggestions for cities when wanting to attract young highly educated professionals into their city.

Summary

City branding is crucial in today's competition between cities and it plays a critical role in forming perceptions on cities, leading to positive outcomes such as awareness and attractiveness of the city and intentions to study and invest in the city. This thesis identifies the success factors of city brands and city marketing in the perspective of highly educated future professionals.

Conclusions

Millennials interviewed in this thesis appreciate business, services, jobs, development, water and nature, happenings, good transportation connections and international atmosphere in cities. Word-of-mouth communication was found to be the most effective channel influencing millennials' perceptions on cities, but creative marketing tactics and social media channels like Facebook and Instagram were also found to be effective tools for building a city brand.

Key words: *City brands, cities, millennials, city marketing, city brand management, urban planning*

Language: English

Grade:

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION	1
1.1. Background and Research Problem	1
1.2. Research Questions	1
1.3. Research Objectives	2
2. LITERATURE REVIEW	2
2.1. Introduction	2
2.2. Definitions of City Branding	2
2.3. The Importance of City Branding	4
2.4. Pull Factors of City Brands	6
2.5. Challenges of City Branding	7
2.6. Success Factors of City Branding	8
2.6.1. Umbrella Brand and Sub-brands	8
2.6.2. Events	9
2.6.3. Residents	10
2.6.4. Urban Planning	12
2.6.5. Local Authorities	13
2.7. City Marketing Toolbox	14
2.8. Conclusion and Conceptual Framework	16
3. METHODOLOGY	18
3.1. Secondary Research	18
3.2. Primary Research	19
3.3. Conducting the Interviews	19
3.4. Choosing the Interviewees	20
3.5. Interviewee Profiles	22
4. CITY BRANDING – THE CASE OF KUOPIO	24

4.1. Introduction	24
5. FINDINGS	25
5.1. Brand Image of Kuopio.....	25
5.1.1. Positive about Kuopio	27
5.1.2. Negative about Kuopio	32
5.1.3. Intentions about Moving to Kuopio.....	37
5.2. Success Factors of City Branding	37
5.3. Successful City Brands	43
6. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS	46
6.1. Limitations of the Research.....	50
7. CONCLUSION	51
7.1. Main Findings.....	51
7.2. Implications for International Business.....	52
7.2.1. Recommendations for Kuopio.....	52
7.2.2. Recommendations for Cities in General	54
7.3. Suggestions for Future Research.....	55
REFERENCES	57
APPENDICES	66

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background and Research Problem

This thesis is a part of the Bachelor of Science in Economics and Business Administration degree in International Business at Aalto University School of Business, Mikkeli Campus. The purpose of this thesis is to understand the success factors of city brands and to understand the millennial perceptions of the brand of the city of Kuopio and cities in the world in general.

The depopulation of cities outside the capital region is a real problem in Finland and in many countries around the world. One solution to the problem is to build and communicate an appealing city brand image, as it can be a crucial factor determining to go to a place (Hospers, 2004). It is critical for smaller cities to build their city brand and city brand image and add visibility in order to survive in the future by both attracting new residents but also by keeping the current ones. The goal of this research is to be beneficial and valuable for cities that want to improve their brand and built it to be more attractive in the minds of the millennial generation.

There is need for information on the millennial perceptions of cities and city brands. This thesis will address and help fight the problem of depopulation of cities outside capital regions by developing a framework and suggestions for building an effective and attractive city brand with an emphasis of the millennial audience.

The results of this thesis may be of worth and interest to city brand managers and marketers around the world who are interested in building an effective city brand for the millennial audience and attracting young professionals to the city.

1.2. Research Questions

The research questions that this thesis aims at answering are the following:

- 1) What are the critical success factors of city brands?

- 2) What is the brand image millennials have about the city of Kuopio?
- 3) What do millennials look for in a city (e.g. their future hometown)?

1.3. Research Objectives

The research objectives of this thesis are the following:

- 1) To find out how to build an attractive city brand
- 2) To find out what are the critical success factors to use in city branding for the millennial audience and what they look for in a city
- 3) To find out what millennials think of the brand of Kuopio

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Introduction

The object of this literature review is to explain and understand the concepts and components of city branding that can be applied to marketing cities in practice internationally. This literature review is divided into six sections. First, definitions of city branding will be introduced. Second, the importance of city branding in the modern society for economic, social and political reasons are explained. Third, push and pull factors of cities and other major reasons attracting people to move to another city will be looked into. Fourth, common challenges of city branding are discussed. Fifth, success factors of city branding such as events, residents, local authorities and urban planning which affect the city brand image, will be looked into. Finally, media strategies and communication toolbox for city brands will be introduced.

2.2. Definitions of City Branding

According to the American Marketing Association, a brand is a “Name, term, design, symbol or any other feature that identifies one seller’s good or service as distinct from those of other sellers” (www.ama.org). Brands add value to a product, provide social and emotional value and they also have distinctive importance in differentiating

products from the competitors (Kotler & Gertner, 2002) and they play a crucial part in the creation of consumer identity too (Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998).

As places are crucial players in the formation of our consumer identities and their impact is enormous in our everyday lives, places and their reputations have always been managed by place leaders (Anholt, 2004a). Cities have been promoting themselves throughout the history because they have always had the need to attract visitors, customers, investors, traders and settlers (Anholt, 2010).

There have been many definitions of place and city brands but one of the most famous one comes from Kotler et al. (1993) They define the image of a place as “the sum of beliefs, ideas, and impressions people have toward a certain place” cited in Avraham (2004: 427). Place brand is a simplification of the impressions towards the place created by the human mind attempting to process big amounts of information and data about the place (Kotler & Gertner, 2002). The brand integrates the core industrial historical cultural and geographical attributes into one package (Zhou & Wang, 2013). Place brands are simplified stereotypes that might not even reflect the actual reality, but those stereotypes are very persuasive (Kotler & Gertner, 2002).

Ashworth and Kavaratzis (2009) define place branding as applying marketing techniques and strategies to develop cities, regions and countries economically, politically and culturally. The authors also suggest that city branding is understood as creating expectations in current and potential city customers’ minds and then making sure the expectations are met in reality and experienced by the users. Place brand is the place’s desired reputation, how it is seen by the world (Hospers, 2004). City branding is a tool for making the place famous (Anholt, 2010) and known places are generally seen as more attractive (Hospers, 2004).

Many researchers also suggest that a place brand is in various ways similar to a corporate brand (e.g. Kavaratzis, 2004). Corporate brand is the visual, verbal and behavioral expression of an organization’s business model (Knox & Bickerton, 2003), which is communicated through the organization’s values, mission, design and culture (Simoes & Dibb, 2001). Both corporate brands and city brands have multiple stakeholders (Kavaratzis, 2004), both have social responsibility to address and both

are highly complex and intangible (Ave, 1994). These factors make city and corporate brands highly similar.

Some scholars suggest that there are significant similarities between product brands and place brands (e.g. Rainisto, 2003; Ashworth & Kavaratzis, 2009). People understand cities and places in the same way as they understand brands, products and corporations (Ashworth & Kavaratzis, 2009) and places satisfy needs and wants just like products do (Hospers, 2004). Thus, places should be branded just like products are branded (Rainisto, 2003). However, there is general agreement that cities are too different from products to be branded in the same way and the need for special branding tactics is inevitable (e.g. Anholt, 2004a; Kavaratzis, 2004 & 2009). Hankinson (2007) identifies the significant differences between place and product brands; the co-production and co-consumption of place products in order to create value, and the political accountability and administrative overlap that are associated with the act of branding cities, regions and countries.

Although difficult, it is very important to try to control the city's image and brand as all encounters with the city happen through perceptions and images (Kavaratzis, 2004). Cities like Liverpool and Bilbao and even countries like Ireland and New Zealand have successfully changed the ways people talk about them by applying relevant branding and image management methods (Anholt, 2004).

2.3. The Importance of City Branding

The goal of city branding and city image management is to improve the cities' positions as attractive leisure and business tourism locations and as lucrative places where to study, work and live (Saunders & Parkerson, 2005). The importance of city branding is often argued by competition and differentiation from the competitors.

City brands need to satisfy three main target groups: visitors, companies and residents (Hospers, 2004). Positive place image is a crucial factor in decisions of those target audiences such as where to emigrate or where to go for a holiday, where to set up a business, where to allocate resources or establish facilities for industries (Avraham, 2004). Place branding makes people aware of the place's existence (Keller, 1998) and

increases the attractiveness of the place (Rainisto, 2003). These images that people hold about places can affect decisions of people concerning travelling, investing and migrating (Kotler & Gertner, 2002). The formed associations of cities lead to brand effects such as willingness to stay at a place (Zenker & Gollan, 2010) and commitment and satisfaction (Braun & Zenker, 2010) which are crucial effects for the city's future. Thus, it can be argued that city branding contributes to economic development (Kavaratzis, 2004).

Countries like Finland need highly educated young people which is the major group leaving the country and this migration can be governed by improving the attractiveness of the place (Elo, 2017). Competition for skilled workers is fierce and some cities and regions are more attractive than others (Mahroun, 2000). Those competitive places are able to attract creative and competent people (Kitson et al., 2004). Place brand can even be a crucial factor determining to go to a place as people make decisions to live or work somewhere not only based on the actual characteristics of the place but also on the basis of the image the place sends (Hospers, 2004). Hospers (2004) also found that some people wouldn't have considered certain places as plausible locations to live or work in if it wasn't for the places' branding campaigns. Thus, attractive place brand is a crucial factor determining important choices in people's lives that will have a long term financial and social impact.

The benefits of branding are extensive and can be applied to cities as well. These benefits include identification with the city, credibility guarantee and intangible value (Murphy, 1992), promise of performance (Feldwick, 1991), trust (Morgan et al., 2004) and facilitation of the consumer choice process (Doyle, 1989). The list can be continued with increased customer loyalty and decreased vulnerability to competitors (Keller, 2003). An attractive place brand attracts tourism, talent and investment (Morgan et al., 2004). Cities names add extra value to the experience and this can be seen in practice when many product brands add city names to their products to create status and other positive associations to benefit from (Saunders & Parkerson, 2005). City branding simplifies and unifies the messages the city sends along with a strong vision of the city and it is also a cost-effective tool for creating a strong international reputation (Anholt, 2004a).

Although there is need for labor, investment, resources and tourism and the bottom line of place branding is indeed economic (Saunders & Parkerson, 2005), city branding provides a channel for the city's residents to identify with the city along with offering a chance to pursue economic development (Kavaratzis (2004). Place branding is used to face and overcome problems like cultural diversity and social alienation (Kavaratzis, 2004). City branding can increase the wellbeing of its residents (Anholt, 2004a) and the brand can provide a sense of identity and purpose for the residents of the city (Hall, 2004). In addition, it is a great tool for creating value by unlocking the talent of the city's people (Anholt, 2004a).

2.4. Pull Factors of City Brands

Cities emerge, develop and disappear. One of the major reasons for the collapse of civilizations is population decline, as was seen in the destruction of ancient Maya cities like the Petén region where areas were abandoned and populations displaced, resulting in a rapid collapse of the kingdoms (Demarest, 2013). Thus even today, it is crucial for countries, regions and cities to both attract and maintain human capital and labor force to survive now and develop in the future, and the significance of having human capital available will even grow in the upcoming years (Heikkilä, 2017).

There are different factors which affect educated professionals' decision to move into and out of cities. Mismatch between an individual's education and the jobs offered is one factor that pushes work based migration (Parkins, 2010). Mahroun (2000) suggests that reasons for moving are different according to the occupation which the person has. They suggest that academics and scientists are driven mainly by the qualities, prestige and scientific openness of the educational institutions in the city as well as the required conditions of the research they're conducting (Mahroun, 2000). Engineers are mainly pushed and pulled by economic factors, they'll go where they find the best offer for their skills. Mahroun (2000) continues with students. Students seem to be pulled by post-education opportunities, venture capital availability and business friendly atmosphere, which are major factors to make them stay at a place or move to another (Mahroun, 2000). Mahroun (2000) also found that the same reasons that attract students attract also entrepreneurs which are less legislations and

bureaucracy for new businesses. Entrepreneurs are affected by factors that benefit and make it easier to start a business, for example, tax allowances, availability of supporting funds and protection policies might make them relocate (Mahroun, 2000). Lowell and Finlay (2001) found that major pull factors for work-based educated migrants to were better wages and better work conditions, better recruitment and information flow as well as cheaper transportation. The list can also be continued with strong industry, good health care and educational opportunities (Palat, 2017).

Although employment opportunities and economic factors are very important for educated migrants, most people migrate with economic reasons mixed with other reasons (Palat, 2017). Lack of social opportunities is one more reason for migration (Parkins, 2010). To attract highly educated and skilled workers, policy makers should aim at increasing employment possibilities and educational programs and opportunities simultaneously (Quinn & Rubb, 2005) and communicate those benefits offered by the place (Kotler & Gertner, 2002; Rainisto, 2003) to attract mass migration of skilled professionals to their city.

2.5. Challenges of City Branding

As cities are big concepts, creating a city brand is not necessarily easy. City brands encounter and interact with multiple large target audiences and stakeholders to respond to (Kavaratzis, 2004) and the brands are built by multiple actors like municipal administrators (Braun, 2008), residents (Kavaratzis, 2004) and political national decision-makers (Avraham, 2004), making the processes even more complicated. The problem is multiplied by the different brand knowledge, interests, values, lifestyles and perspectives of target audiences have about the city (Anholt, 2004a; Braun et al., 2013). Many different stakeholders with different perceptions and objectives mean small budgets, little management control and external and internal pressures which create additional challenges (Morgan & Pritchard, 2004). All the different customer expectations have to be met in the brand communication (Anholt, 2004b). However, if the city brand tries to be all things for all people, it fails to maximize the value of its core functions (Parkerson & Saunders, 2005). This was seen in the case of branding Berlin in 2008, when the city started an internal branding campaign “Be Berlin” which

was successful for residents but failed when trying to implement the same campaign for tourists and businesses (Braun & Zenker, 2010). Thus, it is important to find a balance between customization and coordination.

Cities are also very vulnerable to external factors that they cannot directly control such as environmental disasters which affect the city image tremendously (Kotler & Gertner, 2002; Morgan & Pritchard, 2004). What makes city branding even more complex and difficult, is the fact that it's not just one location that is being branded, it is rather a package of locations (Braun & Zenker, 2010) as cities have multiple different areas and regions in them. Cities also have to take into account the political aspects and deal with municipal administrations when making decisions (Braun & Zenker, 2010), and the public sector is often not as customer oriented as needed for the implementation of a city brand (Buurma, 2001, cited in Braun & Zenker, 2010). Moreover, city branding is a long process (Anholt, 2004a; Morgan & Pritchard, 2004) and thus requires persistence, commitment and patience to be fully implemented and successful (Anholt, 2004a).

2.6. Success Factors of City Branding

Various scholars have suggested different frameworks and success factors for building a city brand. Ashworth and Voogd (1990) were among the first researchers to try to create a framework for place marketing. As discussed earlier, some scholars suggest that the traditional marketing mix with its 4 Ps and other product branding strategies can be used to brand cities as well (Aaker, 1996; Rainisto, 2003) but to gain real success, special strategies should be applied as city brands are perceived in a significantly different way in comparison with product brands (e.g. Kavaratzis, 2004 & 2009; Braun & Zenker, 2010). This section will introduce factors generally found to contribute to the city brand's success.

2.6.1. Umbrella Brand and Sub-brands

As a city is a complex product and has multiple stakeholders, several scholars have

suggested that a city should have an umbrella brand and several target group specific sub-brands under that umbrella brand (e.g. Braun & Zenker, 2010). A diverse brand architecture with a strong umbrella brand and sub-brands are needed to enhance the customer-focused city brand management (Braun & Zenker, 2010).

However, the sub-brands are not independent (Braun & Zenker, 2010), they communicate with each other and influence each other, for example, the tourist brand affects the brands aimed at companies and residents and vice versa. Indeed, the umbrella brand and sub-brands must be consistent with each other or otherwise the city fails to send coordinated and coherent messages to its customers and loses credibility (Rainisto, 2003). Monitoring, coordination and communication between the different brands is crucial (Braun & Zenker, 2010).

Advantages of these sub-brands include efficiency in the city's organizational structure, as cities generally have different sections for different operations such as business development and tourism activities (Braun & Zenker, 2010). Thus, sub-brands lead to improved brand communication with the target groups, which in turn leads to enhanced brand perceptions (Braun & Zenker, 2010). Sub-brands enable the sub-brand managers' concentration to their target group's specific needs and answering them which increases brand identification and other positive brand effects which are enhanced by customized brands as opposed to one general brand (Zenker et al., 2009).

2.6.2. Events

Cities have used events such as expos and sports events as a tool to improve their economies and to build a more positive image (Getz, 1991), since they form strong connections to places and are a means of promoting the city to its target audiences (Kotler & Gertner, 2002). Examples of these strong connections between events and places include occasions like Germany's Oktoberfest and Rio de Janeiro's Samba Carnivals.

Place branding through events is important because it enhances and enriches the culture of the city, which is a key asset when competing for investment, employees and other resources (Zukin, 1995, cited in Richards & Wilson, 2004). Hosting events

attracts people and changing the city's image can be done by encouraging visits to the city by attracting journalists and people who have a big chance for sending positive word-of-mouth communication, and old stereotypes can be changed by experiencing the city personally as it enriches the knowledge and image the people hold about the city (Avraham, 2004).

Events can also be used as a less costly means to build landmarks to create distinctive attractions and differentiation to compete with other cities (Richards & Wilson, 2004). There is evidence that events actually do contribute to the improvement of the city image by increasing the pride of the residents for the city and also by adding buzz and life to the streets of the city (Avraham, 2004; Richards & Wilson, 2004). Dos Santos and Da Costa (cited in Richards & Wilson, 2004) found that over 75% of tourists thought that the city image of Lisbon and the whole country image of Portugal had enhanced as a result from holding the Lisbon 1998 Expo in the city. Especially students and employees highlight the positive effect that events have on the city image (Richards & Wilson, 2004). These findings imply that arranging and holding events is an important tool in constructing the city brand.

2.6.3. Residents

Residents have generally been considered as the target group of the city brand and marketing but there is broad agreement that residents are the core of city branding. Residents should be treated as co-producers of the city, its brand, products and services (Hospers, 2010). Residents' support in building the brand is indeed very important (Rainisto, 2003), and as brands are built through encounters with people, residents should be taken into consideration when building the brand (Braun et al., 2013). According to Anholt's GMI City Brands Index, warmth and openness and other characteristics of the people residing in the city as well as the international status and vibrant lifestyle of the city affect the success of the city brand (Anholt, 2006). Anholt (2004b) suggests that an effective way to build a brand is to build it around the residents and their culture, talent and ambition and to start the whole process with the residents rather than with the city itself. As people are more and more interested in brands for their linking value rather than their use value (Cova, 1997), city brands

should also emphasize the ability to belong to a group and to be a part of something significant along with expressing yourself through the city brand.

The city should prioritize local needs by involving local people, businesses and organizations in developing the brand and gain agreement and support from all the stakeholders (Kavaratzis, 2009). Residents should be a part of making decisions such as choosing the head of the city and to really be able to influence and contribute to political decisions (Braun et al., 2013), and be a part of forming the slogans and planning the campaigns as well (Avraham, 2004). Olsson and Berglund (2009) (cited in Braun et al., 2013) suggest that a preferable way for residents to participate in urban planning and branding is through online communities and surveys.

An example of harnessing the power of the residents is the “Be Berlin” campaign in 2008 which gave the residents of Berlin a chance to influence how their city is represented to the external audiences and gave them a way to participate in promoting the city through their stories and experiences and to be a central part of the brand (Braun et al., 2013). If the residents don’t agree with the brand, it can create serious problems, for example, branding campaigns have even ended in cities like Amsterdam and Manchester as the residents did not identify or agree with the brands and the campaigns possible (Braun et al., 2013). Thus, it is crucial to integrate as many residents as possible (Braun et al., 2013).

Residents can be employed as city brand ambassadors as well. Using celebrities and famous people as brand ambassadors for the city is another successful means of harnessing the power of residents (Braun et al., 2013). Brand ambassadors increase word-of-mouth communication which is more effective in influencing the target groups and less costly than many other promotion tools to implement, and ambassadors are usually considered as more credible too (Andersson & Ekman, 2009). Residents are also the most important city brand marketers (Kavaratzis, 2004), making brand ambassadors a highly effective tool of branding. Brand ambassador networks evoke feelings of intimacy and create interaction as well as help reach a wide audience of people that would not otherwise be reached, as ambassadors have access to groups that cannot be reached with traditional marketing tools (Andersson & Ekman, 2009). If correctly integrating, ambassador networks are a successful way to explain the city

brand for the residents and make them support the brand and connect with it (Andersson & Ekman, 2009).

2.6.4. Urban Planning

Urban planning is generally considered as an integral part of place branding and improving a city's image. All communication and interaction with the city such as the city's design, people and buildings form perceptions of the city and thus urban planning is crucial (Anholt, 2004a; Kavaratzis, 2004; Hulber, 2006). Braun and Zenker (2010) argue that the place's physics is the most important factor of place communication as the tangible characteristics are what have a great impact on people's perceptions of the city and its brand. As city brands are highly intangible, it could be useful to build tangible elements along with it such as monuments and buildings to bring the brand to life (Hospers, 2004). Symbolic shapes like landmarks are just as important as brand personality and identity and thus urban planning is considered to be a crucial factor in city brand building (Hospers, 2004). Many cities and countries have their famous symbols and landmarks that are known all over the world such as Red Square in Moscow (Kotler & Gertner, 2002).

There are many components that can be used to build the more tangible side of the city brand. Sanchez (1997) cited in Rainisto (2003: 31), emphasizes that an internationally competitive cities have good universities, facilities for both business events and cultural events as well as museums, monuments and other landmarks. Richards & Wilson (2004) found that water and modern architecture were the dominant attributes in the image of Rotterdam and also culture and arts were major components that both residents and visitors valued in the city. Kavaratzis (2004) also emphasizes the value of planning public spaces and urban art in the city, improving transportation and cultural and communication infrastructure as critical city brand management success factors.

Trueman and Cornelius (2006) and Anholt (2006) stress the importance of having a strong presence in the city by offering iconic symbols and visual presence in the street environment to create identity and differentiation in comparison with other cities. In

accordance with Anholt (2006) and Trueman and Cornelius (2006), Kavaratzis (2009) also suggests that a city should be able to have a built an environment and physical appearance which match and reinforce the brand.

The importance of providing good basic services and infrastructure which satisfy the residents, visitors and businesses as well as providing new attractions, design, arts and events to attract new people in addition to having good transportation connections into and out of the city are often emphasized by scholars in building the city brand's tangible side (e.g. Kotler et al., 1999; Rainisto, 2003; Kavaratzis, 2004). The importance of providing possibilities by the city such as educational services is crucial in the success of the city brand (Anholt, 2006). If basic services are not improved, the whole branding campaigns can prove to be useless (Avraham, 2004).

2.6.5. Local Authorities

City branding is increasingly becoming a task of the whole city management. Hubbard and Hall (1998) stress the importance of the local governors' and actors' role in managing the city's image. Kavaratzis (2004) suggests that organizational structures and administrative policies have a great impact on the perceptions of the city brand and thus the city should improve the structure of the city's governing to be more effective, have a clear vision for the city and have community development networks increasing the residents' participation as well, as discussed earlier.

It is crucial for private and public agents (Hospers, 2004) and major local companies (Anholt, 2004b) to cooperate as city brand building belongs to all the city's stakeholders (Kotler et al., 2002; Hospers, 2004). Although many politicians and local governors are not educated in city branding (Anholt, 2004a), several scholars mention the importance of having support from top leaders of the place in success of the branding process (e.g. Andersson & Ekman, 2009) as they can provide significant support in enriching the cultural and economic development of the city (Parkerson & Saunders, 2005). Hankinson (2007) has also emphasized the importance of having a strong city brand leadership in the branding processes in his five step framework. He suggests that the city's local authorities should have a strong brand oriented organizational culture in

addition to coordinating all the processes happening within the organization in order to successfully manage a place brand.

Having good local partnerships within the major actors in the city is another success factor emphasized in the literature on city branding. In his five step city branding framework, Hankinson (2007), suggests having strong partnerships with companies and other organizations is crucial. Strong partnerships with local businesses and organizations in the city are generally agreed to be a crucial factor in building city brands (Kotler et al., 1999; Rainisto, 2003; Trueman & Cornelius, 2006). As city branding is highly intangible, it cannot operate on its own and it should be built on partnerships with local organizations and decision-makers (Metaxas, 2007). Partnerships inform people about the city, its major components and influence their perceptions about the city (Keller, 2000).

2.7. City Marketing Toolbox

This section will explain the channels through which city brands and their above discussed success features can be communicated. It is crucial to communicate the place's advantages to its target audiences (Rainisto, 2003). Media strategies can help change the perceptions people have about cities (Tzou and Wang, 2013). Entertainment industry, TV shows and movies help people form images about the place and especially strongly in a negative way (Kotler & Gertner, 2002). The city communicates also through how it acts in domestic and foreign policy, in which ways it encourages trade, recruiting and inward investment and how the residents of the city behave (Anholt, 2004a).

Corporate identity is a way to communicate values and aspirations and individuality of the corporation to its stakeholders as well as to differentiate it from the competitors (van Riel & Balmer, 1997). Identity is an important player in city branding too and the first steps in place branding are to establish the core values of the brand (Morgan & Pritchard, 2004). Having a brand personality with emotional attributes is also critical in forming emotional attachment with the city (Trueman & Cornelius, 2006). Strong

identity is an important asset in sending a consistent image and messages of the city to all stakeholders (Simoes & Dibb, 2001).

As visual parts of the city brand such as the city's logo, slogan and name are big players in communicating about the city and forming perceptions of the city, its identity and features, changing these components could help improve the city's image (Avraham, 2004). For example, a region in Israel added the symbol @ to their logo to be considered as more technologically advanced to attract companies and employees (Avraham, 2004).

Many scholars stress the importance of having consistent messages in every existing communication channel and that those messages also need to be in accordance with the reality of the city that the audiences experience (e.g. Kavaratzis, 2004; Hulberg, 2006; Braun & Zenker, 2010). Inconsistent messages will result in decreased credibility of the communication (Rainisto, 2003) and although brand communication should be customized to different target groups to be effective, it also needs to be integrated in the brand communication as the different city customers cannot be entirely separated from each other (Zenker & Beckmann, 2013).

In the global world where everything and everyone is online, digital marketing efforts cannot be forgotten in city branding either. The traditional media does not offer the benefits of social media; two-way communication, efficient feedback and participation (Tzou & Wang, 2013). In addition, digital marketing is an effective way to target and reach millennials (Smith, 2012) and thus it is crucial to go online.

In website marketing, quality of information has been found to be one of the success factors along with security, ease of use and navigation and fulfillment (Park & Gretzel, 2007; Kim & Fesenmaier, 2005). Park and Gretzel (2007) also suggest that the place's website should be visually pleasing as well as include some customization according to the target group. Visually pleasing content was found to be a major factor which made website visitors stay for longer (Kim & Fesenmaier, 2008) and the use of graphics is also a highly effective way especially in catching the attention of millennials (Smith, 2012).

Creating social involvement and interaction by encouraging peer communication and sharing is another crucial factor which should be taken into consideration when designing a city marketing strategy (Park & Gretzel, 2007). Millennials consider peer opinions as more credible than traditional advertising and their online culture is all about participation, influencing others and being influenced by others (Smith, 2012). Indeed, participation is found to be a crucial factor in online marketing along with engaging consumers and creating customized and personalized encounters which encourage involvement and interaction with the brand (Gretzel et al., 2000; Smith, 2012) and appeal to emotions which is another crucial success factor of place websites (Park & Gretzel, 2007). Creating inspirational encounters evoke positive first impressions which are formed within the very first seconds of visiting the website (Kim & Fesenmaier, 2008) and those inspiring impressions are crucial when wanting to encourage people to visit places (Park & Gretzel, 2007).

2.8. Conclusion and Conceptual Framework

Although city branding and city image management are relatively new concepts in the academic world, cities have always been brands (Anholt, 2004a) and branding is crucial for cities' economic development by attracting investment, tourism and resources internationally (Kavaratzis, 2004). However, city branding does not come without any challenges, cities have multiple stakeholders with different aspirations, cities include multiple different locations in one package and cities are also politically accountable in their operations. Although cities usually already have an image and they can be persistent (Kotler & Gertner, 2002), cities can be branded by using several methods ranging from planning and constructing the urban environment and engaging residents as brand ambassadors to communication and media strategies.

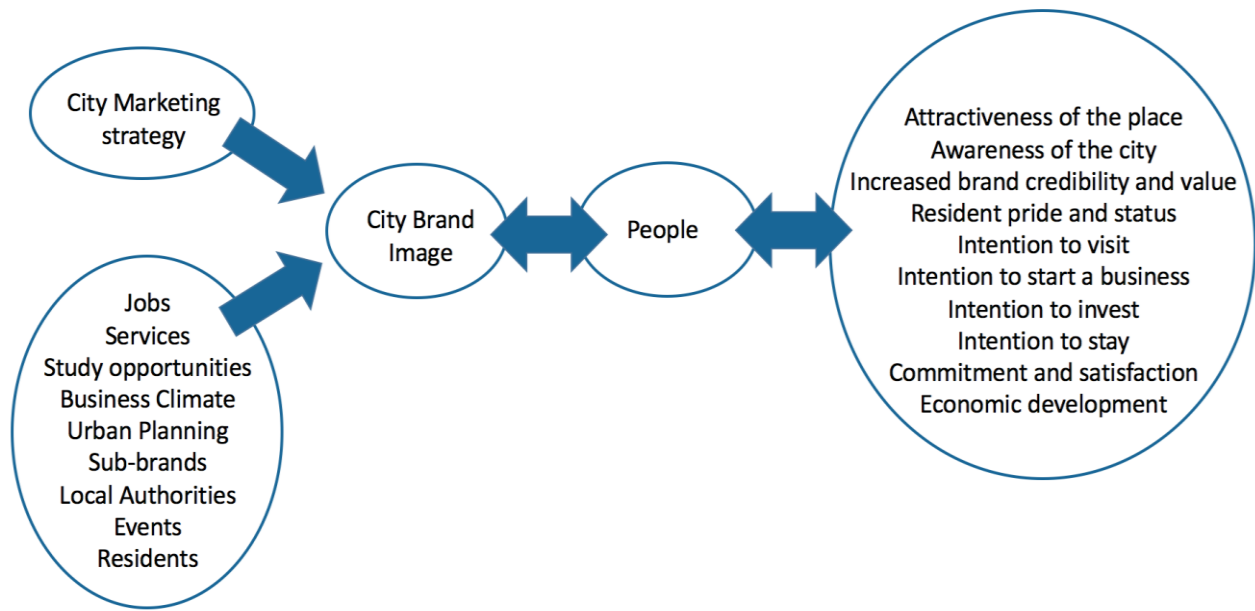


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework developed by Anne-Mari Pelkonen

On the basis of the literature, a conceptual framework (figure 1), which can be applied to the topic of city branding, was developed. The literature reviewed shows that city branding activities presented on the left in the conceptual framework such as events, urban planning, sub-brands, residents and local authorities as well as the availability of jobs, services, business climate and study opportunities affect the city brand image people have about the city. These city brand components can be seen in the conceptual framework on the left. City marketing strategies such as communications, media and social media also affect people's perceptions about the city, contributing to the formation of the city brand image that people have. These causal connections are presented with arrows in the conceptual framework.

The formed city brand image which people have, results in and interacts with outcomes such as awareness and attractiveness of the city, increased credibility and value of the city, possibilities to identify with the city resulting in increased resident pride and status. City branding activities also help building a stronger reputation for the city and branding can lead to positive effects such as intentions to study, visit, stay, start a business or invest in the city as seen above in the conceptual framework. City branding activities increase residents' commitment towards the city and satisfaction with the city. These outcomes can be seen on the right side in the conceptual framework. All the outcomes of city brand image contribute to economic development of the city, region and country.

The interaction is two-way so that the above-mentioned results and outcomes such as awareness and attractiveness of the place also affect people and the brand image they hold about the place. This interaction is presented with double headed arrows in the conceptual framework.

3. METHODOLOGY

This section presents how the research in this thesis was conducted. This thesis used both previously collected secondary research by scholars and primary research collected by qualitative interviews. The material for this thesis was collected between November 2017 and March 2018. Next, the methodology for both secondary and primary research is explained in more detail.

3.1. Secondary Research

The secondary research in this thesis was done in the form of a literature review to provide a basic introduction to the concepts of city branding and to better understand the factors contributing to the success of cities and their brands. The sources for the secondary research conducted in the literature review above are mostly articles from academic journals concerning urban planning, city brand management, city development and city marketing, written and published in the past 10-20 years. Research by authors like Kotler & Gertner (2002), Anholt (2004a & 2004b), Kavaratzis (2004), Asworth & Kavaratzis (2009) and Braun & Zenker (2010) were used extensively. The secondary research provided a platform on which to build the conceptual framework and compare the results of the primary research later in this thesis.

Secondary research was also conducted for section 4 of this thesis, to introduce Kuopio, the case city of this thesis, as one of the objectives of this thesis was to research the image millennials have on the city of Kuopio. Studies conducted by the city of Kuopio in 2016 and 2017 were used to provide a basic introduction to Kuopio

and information from 2016 and 2017 by Statistics Finland was used to gain knowledge on population and population growth in Kuopio.

3.2. Primary Research

The chosen method to research the millennial perceptions of Kuopio as a city and the success factors of city brands was qualitative interviews. Many studies researching city brands from the viewpoint of people are done via surveys (e.g. Zenker & Beckmann, 2013), so the interviews add new aspect and value to the existing research. Qualitative research methods are well fitting when wanting to research emotions, experiences feelings, perceptions or motivations of people (Langer, 2005) which is indeed what the primary research of this thesis was conducted for. Interviews have also been used previously in some research conducted about similar topics and city brands (e.g. De Carlo et al., 2009), making it a viable qualitative research tool for this topic.

3.3. Conducting the Interviews

15 interviewees were chosen for the primary research. The sample size was decided to be 15, as it provides insights while still being sufficiently small for analyzing each answer thoroughly within the time and resource constraints (Robinson, 2014). This sample size enables contrasting and comparing the individual answers comprehensively while still providing sufficient data for some generalities (ibid.).

15 interviews were conducted in the period of two weeks during February 2018. Most of the interviews were conducted in person, but due to time constraints and distance between the interviewer and interviewee, a few interviews were conducted via Skype and e-mail. Skype is generally considered to have many benefits as a qualitative research tool, being very close to face-to-face interviewees (Sullivan, 2012) and e-mail is also considered to be a viable method for conducting in-depth interviews and providing high-quality data efficiently and effectively (Meho, 2006). Table 1 shows how each interview was conducted.

In person	Skype	E-mail
10	4	1

Table 1: Format of Interviews

The interviews included 21 questions and were semi-structured. Some questions were asked from all the respondents, but follow-up questions were posed when needed to get additional information and insights on the things mentioned. The semi-structured interview design made it possible for the respondents to share their experiences and deeper thoughts on the subjects.

The interviews were roughly divided into three parts; the first nine questions were demographic questions, the next eight were questions concerning Kuopio and its brand and the last four questions were about cities and their brands in general.

The interviews were all conducted in Finnish, as Finnish was the native language of all the interviewees. The interviews were between 15-30 minutes of length per person. All interviews were recorded with the permission of the respondents to further analyze the conversation and answers. The specific interview questions can be found in appendix 1.

3.4. Choosing the Interviewees

The respondents were chosen systematically. The goal was to find millennial university students and educated workers. The term millennial is used to describe the people born in the last two decades of the 20th century (McDonald, 2015). Millennials were chosen as the target research group because of the mobile and exploratory character of the generation. Millennials were found to change jobs more and have more mobile careers than other generations before them (Lyons et al., 2012), indicating that the generation will have an enormous impact on cities in the future (Pendall, 2012).

The interviewees were all millennials between 20-27 years of age and either students or at work. As cities need to attract human capital and labor force in order to develop

(e.g. Heikkilä, 2017) and countries like Finland need educated young people which is the major group leaving the country (Elo, 2017), educated millennials and future professionals were chosen for the interviews to find out their perceptions on city brands and their attractiveness. Majority of the respondents are currently residing in Mikkeli and are students of the BScBA program in International Business at Aalto University School of Business Mikkeli Campus. These students were chosen not only because of convenience, but because they are future business professionals with knowledge and opinions and many of them have intentions about moving abroad after graduation, making it the group of people cities want to keep in the city and attract into the city. As cities need these highly skilled professionals and these students will start their careers and build their families in the upcoming years having a great impact on cities, this sample matched the objectives of this study well, to find out how to attract these future professionals into a city by building an appealing city brand.

The interviewees were chosen purposefully to get different opinions and experiences from the respondents. Purposeful sampling can be used when wanting to ensure gaining unique and diverse perspectives on a chosen topic (Robinson, 2014). The interviewees were chosen to be from different parts of Finland that had some international experience from living abroad or in different places and in different sized cities in Finland. This was done to get more diverse aspects and experiences of different cities and to overall understand how people from different sized cities and from different parts of Finland perceive Kuopio, cities in general, city pull factors and city brands.

The respondents can be divided roughly into three categories: those who have never lived in Kuopio, those currently residing in Kuopio and those who have lived in the city but have then moved out. This was done to gain understanding of how the lack of knowledge affects the perceptions and the brand image of the city of Kuopio, as internal and external target audiences, such as residents and visitors often have different associations, experiences and perceptions of cities (Zenker & Beckmann, 2013).

3.5. Interviewee Profiles

Specific interviewee profiles can be found in tables 2 and 3.

Interviewee	Age	Gender	Nationality	Student/at work
E1	20	Female	Finnish	Open university student and part time worker
E2	21	Male	Finnish	University Student
E3	20	Female	Finnish	University Student
E4	21	Male	Finnish	University Student
E5	21	Male	Finnish	University Student/Entrepreneur
E6	20	Male	Finnish	University Student/part-time worker
E7	20	Male	Finnish	University Student
E8	21	Female	Finnish	University Student
E9	20	Female	Finnish	University Student
E10	22	Female	Finnish	At work
E11	24	Male	Finnish	University Student
E12	22	Female	Finnish	Entrepreneur
E13	22	Female	Finnish	University Student/part-time worker
E14	23	Female	Finnish/Zambian	University Student/part-time worker
E15	27	Female	Finnish	University Student/part-time worker

Table 2: Interviewee Profiles

Interviewee	Area of study/work	City of current residence	City of origin	Cities in which you have lived
E1	Business	Kuopio	Lapinlahti	Lapinlahti, Kuopio
E2	Medicine	Kuopio	Kuopio	Kuopio
E3	International Business	Mikkeli	Hämeenlinna	Hämeenlinna, Brisbane (Australia), Dudeldorf (Germany), Mikkeli
E4	International Business	Mikkeli	Seinäjoki	Seinäjoki, Mikkeli
E5	International Business	Mikkeli	Riihimäki	Vantaa, Launonen, Riihimäki, Mikkeli
E6	International Business	Mikkeli	Helsinki	Helsinki, Savonlinna, Vantaa, Northern Norway, Mikkeli
E7	International Business	Mikkeli	Oulu	San Diego, Honolulu (USA), Oulu, Mikkeli
E8	International Business	Mikkeli	Espoo	Espoo, Mikkeli, Trinidad (Uruguay), Bilbao (Spain)
E9	International Business	Mikkeli	Lahti	Milbrook (USA), Lahti, Savonlinna, Joensuu, Mikkeli
E10	Optometry	Vaasa	Kuopio	Kuopio, Oulu, Vaasa, Mariehamn, Tallin (Estonia)
E11	Law	Liverpool (UK)	Vihti	Nurmijärvi, Vantaa, Siuntio, Vihti, Helsinki, Liverpool (UK)
E12	Health Services	Tampere	Kuopio	Kuopio, Savonlinna, Tampere
E13	International Business	Mikkeli	Raahe	Pattijoki, Raahe, Oulu, Mikkeli
E14	International Business	Mikkeli	Helsinki	Helsinki, Rovaniemi, Mikkeli, Lusaka (Zambia), Calgary (Canada), Annecy (France)
E15	International Business	Mikkeli	Helsinki	Helsinki, Lindenhurst (USA), Mikkeli

Table 3: Interviewee Profiles

4. CITY BRANDING – THE CASE OF KUOPIO

This section will introduce the city of Kuopio, basic information and statistics about the city, which is the example city of the empirical research in this thesis.

4.1. Introduction

Kuopio is a city located in Northern Savonia, Eastern Finland. It is the 9th biggest city in Finland with its 118 000 inhabitants and the city was established in 1775 (City of Kuopio, 2017a & 2017e). One of the three campuses of the University of Eastern Finland is located in Kuopio and one of the five university hospitals in Finland, Kuopion yliopistollinen sairaala (KYS) is located in Kuopio (ibid.). The city has also other major schools and education opportunities like Savonia University of Applied Sciences (ibid.). The city is surrounded nature with the lake Kallavesi, Puijo hill and forests and the Tahko ski resort. The city of Kuopio hosts many events from dance and arts to music festivals and sports events each year (City of Kuopio, 2017a & 2017e)

The unemployment rate of Kuopio was 11,5% at the beginning of 2018 (City of Kuopio, 2017d). Kuopio is currently enjoying positive net immigration of about 800 migrants, the majority of the migrants being students. Kuopio is gaining inhabitants from close by municipalities like Siilinjärvi and Iisalmi but also from bigger cities like Helsinki, Joensuu, Jyväskylä and Oulu and losing inhabitants to Siilinjärvi, Helsinki, Joensuu, Jyväskylä and Tampere (City of Kuopio, 2017c). Kuopio is a growing city with a population growth rate of 0,7%, making it the 10th fastest growing city of the 32 biggest municipalities in Finland in 2016 (Statistics Finland, 2016).

There were 3772 people between ages 16-18, 11 407 people between ages 19-24 and 23 688 people between ages 25-39 in Kuopio in 2017, so the amount of the millennial population was roughly 38 867 (City of Kuopio, 2017d). In 2016 the number of population in working age, between 15-64 years-old, was 76 703, which was 65,1 % of the whole population of Kuopio (Statistics Finland, 2017). The proportion of over 65-year-old people was 19,8%, which is bigger than the proportion of people under 15 years old (15%). The population of Kuopio is getting older and by 2030, the number of

over 75-year-old people will grow by 70% (City of Kuopio, 2017c). The number of pensioners in Kuopio has already almost doubled during the 21st century and in 2016 the number of over 65-year-olds exceeded the number of under 18-year-olds (City of Kuopio, 2017c).

These findings suggest that as the population is getting older, Kuopio needs to attract young people into the city in order to keep growing and developing in the future.

5. FINDINGS

In this section of this thesis, the findings of the interviews are presented. First, the brand image millennials have about Kuopio will be presented and discussed. Next, the discussion will move onto the bigger picture and introduce more general findings concerning city brands and their success factors and pull factors for the millennial audience.

5.1. Brand Image of Kuopio

4 out of the 15 interviewees had lived in Kuopio at some point in their lives and 14 out of the 15 respondents had all visited Kuopio at some point in their lives. People had visited Kuopio mainly due to student events held in the city by different student organizations but also to meet friends. The brand image of Kuopio according to the millennial respondents can be found in figure 2. The most appraised components and features are larger and the features have been classified into categories for clarification.

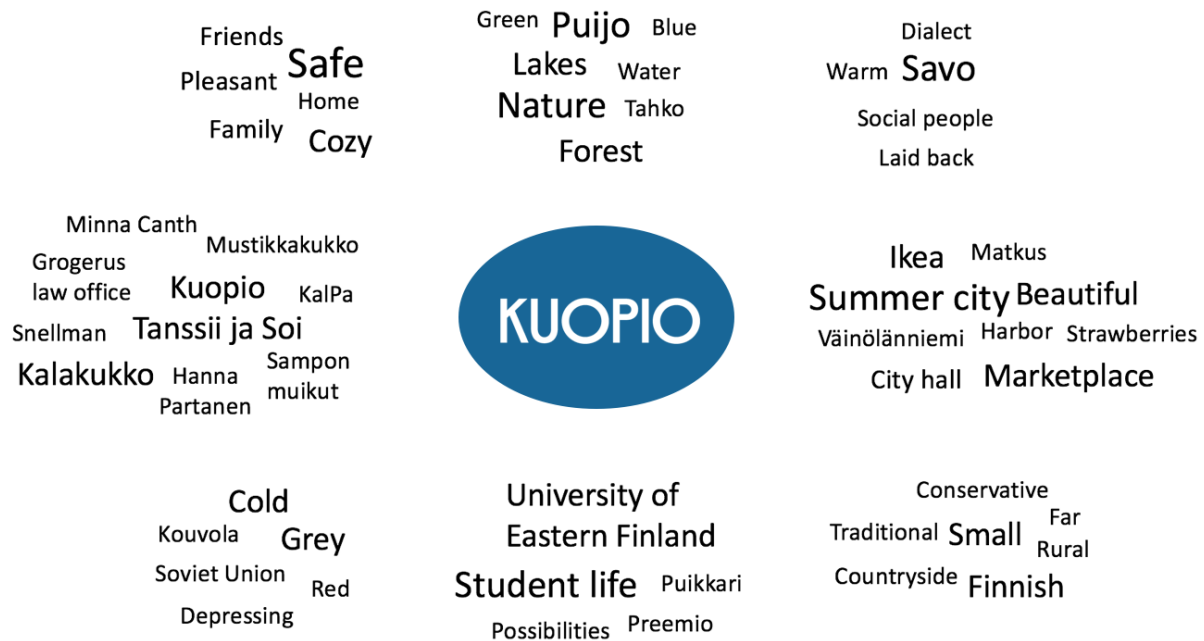


Figure 2: Brand Image of Kuopio

The most appraised components of Kuopio were landmarks like the Puijo hill and tower and the marketplace as well as the nature with its forests and lakes. The University of Eastern Finland and Kuopio's student life were other aspects that were highlighted in the conversation. Events like Kuopio Tanssii ja Soi (a local dance and music festival during the summer) and famous food products in the city like Kalakukko were other things associated with the city. Kuopio is very tightly connected to Savonia and thus the adjectives like social and laid back people as well as the Savonian dialect were other much appraised aspects.

The overall the image of Kuopio was quite positive and those who currently live or have lived in the city (Interviewees E1, E2, E10 and E12), had a more positive image of it than those who have only visited the city for a short period of time. Overall, the image of Kuopio was highly positive according to the interviewees and Kuopio was thought to be a beautiful summer city close to nature.

Next, the more specific success factors and challenges of Kuopio and the intentions of millennials moving to Kuopio will be discussed.

5.1.1. Positive about Kuopio

Nature

Nature was one of the most appraised components of Kuopio's image in the interviews. The landscape with blue lakes and forest was one of the first things coming to the interviewees' minds when they were asked about the city. Overall, 12 out of the 15 interviewees, both those who have lived in the city and those who have only visited the city, mentioned forest, water, lakes and hills in their first thoughts about Kuopio. Even if knowledge on Kuopio was otherwise low, nature was strongly associated with and Kuopio.

"Kuopio seems like a very pretty place, close to the nature and there is Tahko nearby, you have height differences, forests, lakes and Puijo." (Interviewee E14).

"The nature is a lovely thing about Kuopio, there are a lot of lakes and you can see water and go to the lake almost everywhere" (Interviewee E10).



Figure 3: Photograph of Kuopio from above (n.d.)

People

People living in Kuopio were mostly considered to be social, laid back and friendly and that was one of the most highlighted aspects when the interviewees were asked about their thoughts on Kuopio. The residents of Kuopio were the among the first factors mentioned by each interviewee. For many interviewees, people were one of the best things in Kuopio when they were asked about what is good and what is bad about Kuopio. 12 out of 15 interviewees all mentioned the friendly and social residents of Kuopio and the factor was highly appraised also by those who had little other knowledge of the city. The residents shaped the whole broad image the interviewees had about Kuopio. People in Kuopio had left a positive image on those visiting the city or meeting people from the city. Kuopio is strongly associated with the laid back attitude of Savonia and that association have built it a strong image in the millennials minds, recognized by people from different areas in Finland. Also, those who spent their childhood in Kuopio (interviewees E1, E2, 10 and E12) associated Kuopio strongly with their friends and family in the city, describing the city as safe and cozy.

“The people in Kuopio are very laid-back and chill. I have very positive vibes about the

people there. All the people coming from Kuopio that I've met have been very nice!" (Interviewee E14).

"I think there are friendly and nice people coming from Kuopio, they go full heart with others and are very warm in interactions." (Interviewee E15.)

Landmarks

When the interviewees were asked about positive things in Kuopio, many respondents mentioned landmarks like Puijo tower and the harbor. The city hall was another factor which the interviewees knew about Kuopio and was mentioned by E1 and E7. A landmark repeatedly mentioned by almost each interviewee was the marketplace in the city center. Marketplace was also one of the most visited places in Kuopio, majority of the interviewees had visited or seen it during their stay in Kuopio. The harbor was another significant and liked place mentioned by several respondents. Other landmarks in Kuopio were not mentioned.

"Kuopio has a beautiful harbor and Väänölänniemi is also very beautiful. There has been a lot of construction and renewing of areas, which is nice and much needed." (Interviewee E1).

I think of the marketplace when I think about Kuopio, it was very lively." (Interviewee E4).



Figure 4: Photograph of the Marketplace and City Hall in Kuopio (Vincente Serra, 2016)



Figure 5: Photograph of the harbor in Kuopio and the Puijo Tower in the background (Soile Nevalainen, n.d.)

Study Opportunities

For the millennial audience out of which 13 out of 15 were students, the study opportunities in Kuopio were very familiar. Many of the interviewees had heard about Kuopio through attending student events and meeting students from Kuopio in other student events around Finland. Majority of the respondents appraised the study opportunities, university, student life and diverse faculties very positively and overall 12 out of 15 interviewees mentioned the student life in the city. Preemio (the student organization of business students in Kuopio) was another thing which came to minds of the interviewees when asked about their knowledge about Kuopio. With respondents E2, E3, E4, E5, E9 and E14 the University of Eastern Finland, student events and study opportunities were among the most appraised and positive factors about Kuopio. Majority of those who had never lived in Kuopio, had visited the city due to some kind of student event held in the city.

“You can study arts, dance, music and theatre in Kuopio, which is possible in very few places in Finland and which is definitely a plus!” (Interviewee E4).

“I know that there is a very big and good university with many faculties you can study different subjects like medicine, which is quite rare. And there is Puikkari of course, the bar where all the students go to, I have been there too!” (Interviewee E14).

Events

Other than student events, the events that were most mentioned during the interviews were Kuopio Tanssii ja Soi as well as Kuopio Wine Festival. Events were only mentioned by interviewees E1, E3 and E6. Other events were not mentioned and events were not a very dominant factor in Kuopio's image and the knowledge of them was very low.

“Kuopio seems like a cultural place where art is appreciated. There are a lot of art things and events happening, which is very nice and also quite unique for Kuopio.” (Interviewee E3).

“There is a lot happening in Kuopio during the summer. The city is very vibrant in the summer, there are many events that get people moving like Kuopio Wine Festival which is a very different and unique event in Finland.” (Interviewee E6).

Services

The services offered in the city was a factor which was mentioned by interviewees E1, E2, E6 and E11. The service aspect was mostly appraised negatively by the respondents, but services like IKEA, Matkus (a shopping centre), restaurants, health services like Kuopio University Hospital and the diversity and availability of sports clubs were considered to be positive about Kuopio.

“Good about Kuopio is the diverse opportunities for sports and leisure. You can find a good sports club for any sport, you can basically have any hobby in Kuopio.” (Interviewee E2).

“I know quite a few good restaurants in Kuopio. The restaurant business and food culture are very well represented in comparison with other ‘smaller’ cities in Finland.” (Interviewee E6).

5.1.2. Negative about Kuopio

Lack of Awareness

One of the main things which was very negative in the minds of the interviewees and was mentioned repeatedly was the lack of knowledge they held about Kuopio when they were asked what do they think of Kuopio and what do they know about Kuopio. Few people could think of something Kuopio is known for or associated with. Many had a more negative image about Kuopio because they did not know about the city. 9 out of the total 15 pointed out that they had really no knowledge on Kuopio.

“Bad about Kuopio is that it is very unknown in relation to the size of the city, nobody knows about it. I have images about almost all the cities, all cities have some kind of event or happening or unique attribute that I associate it with and which help build the image, Seinäjoki has Tangomarkkinat and Joensuu has Ilosaarirock. But I cannot think

of anything Kuopio has, it doesn't have that kind of event or thing to know it for." (Interviewee 4).

"The image of Kuopio is very bad, as people don't know about the city." (Interviewee E7).

"Kuopio does not bring any specific thoughts to my mind. I really have no image about the place although I've visited Kuopio." (Interviewee E8).

"I often associate Kuopio and Kouvola together, they get mixed up very easily" (Interviewee E11).

Location

The factor which most of the respondents regarded as negative, was the location of Kuopio, a factor mentioned by interviewees E3, E4, E5, E7, E8, E14 and E15. Kuopio was thought to be far from everything. However, the location was not mentioned as a bad aspect or at all in the interviews with people who live or have lived in Kuopio.

"What I don't like about Kuopio is that it is kind of in a bad location. It takes time to go North but it's not easy to go to other places either. It's far from South but also from North." (Interviewee E4).

"Kuopio is in the middle of nowhere." (Interviewee E5).

"I would not say the location is bad itself...The location is indeed perfect, as there is beautiful nature, forests and lakes close by. But the distance is a negative aspect, Kuopio very far away from the capital region." (Interviewee E15).

Connections

A very often mentioned negative factor was the bad connections from Kuopio to other cities as well as inside the city, mentioned by interviewees E1, E2, E3, E4, E6, E7, E14 and E15. Those who have not lived in Kuopio, appraised the connections to other cities negatively, and those who live or have lived in Kuopio, appraised the public transportation inside the city negatively.

The public transportation was thought to be complicated, expensive, hard to use and badly scheduled:

“Bad about living in Kuopio is that it’s challenging to move from one place to another, it requires a lot of swapping between buses and takes a lot of time to get from one side of the city to another, it is very complicated. (Interviewee E2).

Public transportation was found to be difficult to use and inadequate from the visitor’s point of view too:

“Public transportation is a negative aspect about Kuopio for a visitor. It is very hard to use and there is lack of information on how to use it. I would have hoped for some kind of guide on how the whole system works.” (Interviewee E6).

Majority of those who have not lived in Kuopio thought Kuopio was hard to reach from different cities and there was lack of awareness about the transportation means to the city and in the city. The lack of awareness increased the image of the city as very far away and hard to travel to.

“Bad connections to everywhere. Is there even an airport in Kuopio?” (Interviewee E7).

“Oulu is also very far away, but you can very easily fly from there to Helsinki. But it would be very hard to go abroad or even to Helsinki for a weekend trip from Kuopio, it requires a lot more work to get away from there.” (Interviewee14).

However, those who live or have lived in Kuopio did not consider the connections to other cities as negative.

Size

The size of Kuopio was considered to be a negative aspect. Many of the respondents were not aware of the real size of the city and it was thought to be a lot smaller than in reality. However, size was not the most mentioned negative factor, it was mentioned only by E7, E8 and E15, all who come from bigger cities. The size was considered to

be a positive factor in the viewpoints of people who currently live or have lived in Kuopio, they described the city as the perfect size, not too big but not too small.

Appearance

Although the nature in Kuopio was appraised to be very beautiful, Kuopio was also described as grey, colorless and depressing, especially by those who have not lived in the city. Some landmarks such as the bus station and Puijo tower were described as ugly and unattractive, especially by visitors.

“Puijo tower is there, you see it every time you drive to the city or through the city. It’s quite a depressing tower. It comes to my mind when I think of Kuopio and it really makes the whole city seen as more grey and unattractive.” (Interviewee E7).

“The bus station is horrible and very old. A thing you probably don’t care about or notice when you live in the city... But it really affects the image of the city for a visitor, in a very negative way.” (Interviewee E9).

Services

The lack of services was another negatively appraised factor in the minds of the interviewees. Especially those coming from bigger cities thought Kuopio’s service offerings were inadequate. The lack of services was mentioned by E1, E6, E7 E9, E10, E11 and E12. They thought there were not enough services and the availability of them at different times was not sufficient. Those who have lived in Kuopio thought the diminishing amount of services in the city center and insufficient opening hours were especially mentioned as negative aspects about Kuopio’s service offerings.

“Negative is all the places stopping business (mainly bars) so there are no good places anymore where to go to with friends.” (Interviewee E1).

“The emptiness of the center is really bad, all the stores are in Matkus and there is nothing in the center. The cafés close very early on the weekends so there are no places to meet friends at.” (Interviewee E10).

Lack of Internationality and Development

Kuopio was thought to be very Finnish, conservative and traditional. It was thought to be a city which was lagging behind from the development of the capital region, making the overall perceptions of the city more negative. The interviewees mentioned the negative attitudes towards different and diverse people and thought Kuopio was not as tolerant towards foreigners as bigger cities. Majority of the respondents mentioned the lack of development and internationality as bad things about Kuopio and also as a crucial reason why they could not imagine moving to Kuopio.

“I would describe Kuopio as traditional because I really don’t get very young vibes about the city. The culture is based on old values and traditions. I think I could imagine people being a bit conservative too. I’d say Kuopio has left behind from what Helsinki is, Kuopio is not very innovative and there is not a lot of business in the city. Kuopio is not the trend setter in any area, it is not a very developing city.” (Interviewee E6).

“The attitudes especially in smaller cities are very different towards immigrants and foreigners and different ethnicities. The lack of internationality is something that I couldn’t live with as I really enjoy the international atmosphere in Helsinki.” (Interviewee E15).

Lack of Career Opportunities

Especially those currently living in Kuopio (interviewees E1 and E2), mentioned the lack of jobs for students or the difficulty of getting a job in Kuopio. The lack of jobs in the business field was also mentioned by many of the interviewees studying business, they thought Kuopio is not a place to build a career in the corporate world. Kuopio was not thought to be a city where the millennials could imagine working in the future.

“There are no interesting job opportunities in Kuopio.” (Interviewee E6)

“I would move to a city with possibilities to succeed, a lot of people, business and a lot of internationality. Kuopio has none of those.” (Interviewee E7).

5.1.3. Intentions about Moving to Kuopio

The interviewees were asked if they could consider moving to Kuopio. Intentions about moving to Kuopio were very positive with those who live or have lived in Kuopio and more negative with those coming from bigger cities. Those who have lived in Kuopio and spent their childhood in the city (interviewees E1, E2, E10 and E12) thought Kuopio was a very family friendly place and could imagine moving back to Kuopio when starting a family. Major reasons for moving back to Kuopio or considering living there in the future were the good services for families, safety and good environment for children.

“Yes, I could definitely live in Kuopio in the future too. I’ve lived here almost all my life and I would want to live somewhere else for a bit and then return to Kuopio. I feel like Kuopio is a very attractive city for families and has good services for families so I could imagine myself raising my kids here.” (Interviewee E1)

“I could definitely move back, I had a nice childhood there and I could think of moving to Kuopio when starting a family.” (Interviewee E10).

Major reasons not moving to Kuopio were the lack of jobs, lack of development and lack of international atmosphere in Kuopio. Some of the respondents also thought the location of Kuopio was a critical factor, as it would be hard to travel and go abroad from Kuopio and it is far away from business and big companies and thus the career opportunities would be fewer. Many could only imagine moving to Kuopio because a special job offering.

“There would have to be a really good and unique job offer to make me move there.” (Interviewee E15).

5.2. Success Factors of City Branding

The interviews contained also questions about cities, their pull factors and brands in general. Here are the identified success factors of cities for the millennial audience.

City Marketing and Communications

All the respondents mentioned word-of-mouth communication as the most important channel affecting their perceptions about cities and how they gain information on cities. What was surprising was that 4 interviewees also mentioned the look of the Snapchat geofilters of the city.

“I judge cities most by what my friends have told me about them, no matter how good the brand is, what my friends tell me affects the most.” (Interviewee E1).

“I would like to move to Jyväskylä at some point, I have never heard a bad thing about the city.” (Interviewee E2).

“I’ve been to Turku only a few times but I have a lot of friends studying in the city. And to know how much it has attracted people, is very, very attractive” (Interviewee E15)."

Interviewees E1, E3 and E14 also mentioned social media as a crucial way to gain knowledge about cities. Snapchat, Facebook and Instagram as well as blogs were the most important channels mentioned. However, as interviewees E14 and E15 pointed out that the content on social media needs to be real and authentic, sponsored posts are not liked.

“I get a lot of info on social media. It doesn’t matter if it is my friend or some social media influencer, when I see a nice picture of a city, I am like, “I want to go there!”. Right now I would love to go to Marrakech as I’ve seen many people posting pictures from there on Instagram. Also, I saw Alexa Dagmar’s blog post on Kuopio and I really thought it seemed very pretty there! But the content has to be real, for example, MyDubai has sent a lot of influencers to Dubai and I am not into that kind of content, it is very fake and does not make me want to go there.” (Interviewee E14).

“I think I would want to go to Kuopio, for example, if I saw a lot of things of it in social media. But the content has to be real, I don’t really like sponsored posts.” (Interviewee E15).

“I have seen cities on Facebook, there are posts like “Seven reasons why Lahti is the

best city in Finland”.” (Interviewee E6).

None of the interviewees visit city websites regularly and only a few have ever visited one. City websites were thought to be complicated and hard to use.

“Cities’ websites are usually horrible; I’d rather google some online forum like vauva.fi if I want to know something about a city like what to do there. You find better information more easily there than on any city website. Helsinki, Espoo, Vantaa, all the websites are total failures. They are badly organized and it is hard to find information.” (Interviewee E6).

Traditional media like newspapers, magazines and TV were channels which was appraised by a few respondents, by interviewees E4, E5, E10 and E15.

“I get information on cities on news on TV and paper. What kinds of news there are on the city, that affects the image of the city. So media presence is crucial and how the city is presented in media. (Interviewee E5).

Events

Events was another factor which was found to influence millennial perceptions on cities. Events were found to add visibility and consciousness of the city and to make it more attractive. The interviewees also mentioned the uniqueness of the events as a crucial factor. If the event is unique and interesting enough, it has a positive effect on the whole city. Having a lot of different cultural events and happenings in the city was considered to be a very important thing. However, events were not the most often important factor, it was mentioned by 7 out of the 15 interviewees.

I get a lot of info on cities through events and the events’ websites and those really affect my perceptions of the city too. For example, I find Turku attractive because of Ruisrock.” (Interviewee E1).

“In my opinion, events add visibility and hype for a city and improve my consciousness about the city.” (Interviewee E8).

“If there is some known international artist in a city, I think of it as more international and developed, so the events inform me about what the city is like.” (Interviewee E11).

Services and Development

Having good services in the city was mentioned by all the interviewees. The interviewees highlighted the importance of having good cafés, bars and shops in the city to spend time in. Services for families was considered to be an important factor in the future, when starting families. Another factor often mentioned was the flexible opening hours of services. Functioning, easy to use and affordable public transportation was another success factor mentioned by 9 out of the 15 interviewees. E14 and E15 both mentioned the tram as the best possible way of moving from one place to another in a city.

“Cheap and well-functioning public transportation with good schedules, affordable cost of living and flexible opening hours of shops, so you can go meet friends in the center.” (Interviewee E12).

“I love the tram. It has a special feeling to it. I often take the tram even if other transportation would be faster, just because of the special feeling.” (Interviewee E15).

Having business, development and innovation was considered to be another crucial factor, mentioned by 9 out of the 15 interviewees. Being surrounded by developing environment, new ideas and business innovation was especially important for business students.

“Helsinki is a city where there is always something being developed. Innovativeness, new services, new innovations, business...those are so important for me in a city.” (Interviewee E6).

Connections and Location

Majority of the interviewees considered the location and connections to other cities very important when regarding cities. Interviewees 13 out of the 15 respondents all highlighted the importance of a city having a central location, close to other cities and especially close to big cities and the capital region so that it is easy to travel to other

places. Interviewees E6, E7, E11, E14 and E15 also emphasized the importance of having an airport nearby.

Student Life

One of the most repeated aspects in cities was the student life in the city. The interviewees, out of which majority were students, highlighted how they also get a lot of information through student events and from friends studying in different cities. 13 out of 15 interviewees all mentioned the attractive student events and student life as an important factor shaping their perceptions on cities. University networks and student events on Facebook were major factors spreading knowledge on different cities. The interviewees also mentioned how the reputation of the university in the city as well as the student organizations build the brand for the whole city.

“I get a lot of information on cities from universities’ websites now that I am applying to university. For example, I find Lappeenranta very attractive as the Lappeenranta University of Technology has been branded so well, and thus I could consider moving there.” (Interviewee E1).

“I have gotten a very nice image on Turku as I have a lot of friends studying there, so the attractive student life and the number of students in the city really build an image to the city.” (Interviewee E13).

“Preemio builds a lot of reputation for Kuopio too. Also, at first I did not like Oulu, but getting to know the city through student events and the networks really enhanced the image and I fell in love with the city through my own student communities.” (Interviewee E14).

Urban Planning

What comes to urban planning and appearance of the city, the interviewees found it very important when they were asked what were the most important pull factors for them in cities. Water was the most appraised component which 12 out of 15 interviewees mentioned as a crucial component in a city. Many also mentioned having safe and peaceful neighborhoods for the future when starting a family. Trail tracks, forests, parks and green areas were other components which were considered

important for the likability of the city. Interviewees E7, E8, E9, E12, E14 and E15 all also mentioned the city's personality and how the architecture and buildings affect the feeling in the city. 8 out of the 15 interviewees also pointed out the importance of having different areas in the city, older areas with a lot of history, more bohemian and artistic areas as well as newer and safe areas for families.

"When starting a family, maybe a smaller city, like Seinäjoki, would be nice, where there's more greenery and green areas and it is a bit more peaceful." (Interviewee E5).

"Saimaa is very much only next to Mikkeli and that is why I don't like Mikkeli as much as I could, water is not a dominant element." (Interviewee E14).

"There has to be something surrounding the city, whether it be other cities, national parks or good trail tracks and forest or good party places, but something to do also outside the city." (Interviewee E4).

"The city needs to be pretty and visually pleasing by architecture, that affects the feeling and atmosphere in the city and how much I like it there. It is also crucial to have parks and run tracks and forest so it's not just a concrete jungle." (Interviewee E9).

"The city has to be in some way established, so that there are nice new urban areas for families and then older areas like Jugend-areas. Those build the city's personality, so that the city is not just a block of houses, which is the case in Mikkeli. Here I don't feel the personality of the city in the same way." (Interviewee E15).

Atmosphere and Internationality

For 13 out of the 15 interviewees, one of the major pull factors of cities was the international atmosphere in the city and the number of happenings, energy and buzz in the city as well as having many different and diverse people. The number of people in the city was also mentioned as a positive thing.

"International climate is also very important in a city. Having that buzz, energy and life in the city. Different and diverse people bring more opportunities." (Interviewee E1).

“I would really like to live abroad because of the internationality, events and things happening around you. It would be a totally different experience. Many cities in Finland are similar, new countries offer exotic experiences.” (Interviewee E9).

“Even the daily life needs to stay interesting. I want to have lots of diverse and interesting people around me. Not only Mattis from Finland.” (Interviewee E14).

Career Opportunities

Career opportunities was another often mentioned factor. However, it was not the most mentioned factor. Career opportunities and job possibilities were mentioned by 10 out of the 15 interviewees.

“I could move to different cities mainly because of good job opportunities. Espoo has a lot of offices of big companies like Rovio and Microsoft and thus I could consider moving to Espoo.” (Interviewee E15).

5.3. Successful City Brands

The interviewees were asked which city has a good brand according to them and why so. Many different cities were mentioned, Copenhagen, Berlin, London, New York, Tampere, Porvoo, Oulu, Helsinki and Rovaniemi were among the most mentioned. What was interesting was that more Finnish cities were mentioned than cities abroad. Overall, cities' brands were found to be attractive because of the international and vibrant atmosphere and a lot of different activities to do as well as having an interesting culture in the city and creative and consistent marketing tactics.

New York and London were thought to be iconic, full of life and things to and very well branded and marketed, mentioned by interviewees E1, E14 and E15.

“London’s marketing is very easily recognizable. They have really emphasized the visual appearance and branding of the tube; it is very famous. You don’t have to go to London to know what it looks like there, that is good marketing.” (Interviewee E14).

Copenhagen was thought to have beautiful architecture and a green brand due to the

biking culture in the city and it was mentioned by interviewees E1, E9 and E11.

“I have been to Copenhagen a few times and I like the city’s architecture and I love how people bike a lot.” (Interviewee 10).

Out of cities in Finland, most often mentioned were Helsinki, Oulu, Turku, Porvoo, Rovaniemi and Tampere. These cities’ brands were mentioned because of unique attributes and associations and careful branding. Helsinki was mentioned overall by 7 out of the 15 respondents.

“Helsinki has really rebranded itself very well in the eyes of foreigners as the design capital of Europe. It’s artistic, cool and innovative” (Interviewee E6).

Tampere was another city mentioned by a few respondents and a few also mentioned it as their favorite city in Finland. Interviewee E4 appraised it as the Helsinki 2.0:

“Tampere has been rebranded well, it has gotten much more youthful. There are a lot of students and a lot of student events, jobs and study opportunities. Tampere is constantly renewing itself and there are a lot of things around the city as well. In addition, it is a very beautiful city. Tampere is like the Helsinki 2.0.”

Lapland was mentioned as a very exotic brand branded around experiences. It was also thought to have a very visible brand and that a lot of effort had been put into marketing it in different medias. Rovaniemi was thought to be a city which had branded itself well around the arctic magic mentioned by interviewees E1, E13 and E15. The interviewees thought Rovaniemi had also gained visibility through famous artists as well as through the exotic arctic circle and good marketing.

“Lapland has been branded well around experiences and adventures.” (interviewee E6).

“Rovaniemi has a good arctic brand built around Santa Claus and winter’s magic. And of course, Antti Tuisku and Lordi are from there and they really have associated themselves with Rovaniemi, for example, by having their own landmarks in the city.”

(Interviewee E13).

“Rovaniemi, Arctic Circle. You are surrounded by the identity and culture of the city as soon as you arrive to the airport. Rovaniemi also has very nice restaurants, laid back but still bohemian.” (Interviewee E15).

Oulu was one of the most mentioned cities, mentioned by 6 interviewees, especially highly appraised by interviewees E7 and E14, who have lived in the city. Oulu was thought to be very creative and innovative in their branding.

“Oulu, ‘The capital of northern Scandinavia’. It is a business center with a lot of start-ups and BusinessOulu is branded successfully also internationally.” (Interviewee E7).

“A while ago, the university of Oulu had their own blue tram in Helsinki where they drove around and you could go in there and talk with the students. The University of Oulu brands itself very well. For example, they have a big picture in the airport of Oulu and it is one of the first things you see when you arrive to the city. The University of Oulu really builds the brand of the city of Oulu too. They both have very nice and creative marketing tactics, new and fresh ideas nobody has seen before.” (Interviewee E14).

A surprising city which was mentioned was Porvoo. It was mentioned by 5 out of the 15 interviewees. It was thought as the luxury city of Finland.

“I could definitely move to Porvoo. it has a very good brand. It is a beautiful city, has a lot of nice architecture like pastel colored houses. It is by the sea and it has the vibe of a small fisher village, but it is also very close to Helsinki.” (Interviewee E13).

“I think Porvoo is like a Finnish luxury city, where people from Helsinki go during the summer. There are beautiful houses and summer villas, interesting history and the beautiful archipelago just around the corner.” (Interviewee E14).

6. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

This section of the thesis analyzes the findings of the interviews and combines it to the theories represented in the literature review. This part is divided to sections by the findings in the literature review and in the empirical research.

Urban Planning and Nature

Urban planning was found to be an important factor affecting people's perceptions on cities in the literature review. The aspect was also one of the most appraised in the empirical research. Anholt (2004) suggested that the city's design and buildings form perceptions about cities and this was also found to hold true for the millennial audience. Hospers (2004) highlighted the effect of landmarks and monuments in building the city brand and Anholt (2006) found out how they also create differentiation in comparison with other cities. Landmarks were also found to affect the city's image and also one of the major things millennials recognized and knew about Kuopio, like the Puijo tower.

Urban planning is considered to be a crucial factor in city branding (Hospers, 2004). Richard and Wilson (2004) found that water was the most important element in Rotterdam's brand image. The architecture, buildings, nature, parks and visual appearance of cities were also among the most mentioned pull factors in cities for the millennial audience in the empirical research of this thesis. The architecture was said to give the city a personality and scholars like Trueman and Cornelius (2006) have also highlighted having a personality with emotional attributes is critical in forming emotional attachment with the city in their research. Water and forests were the most dominant attributes in the city brand image of Kuopio and water was also thought to be most important element in cities in general. Water and nature made the cities seem more attractive and was also mentioned as a crucial factor when discussing intentions about moving to a certain city, as seen also in the conceptual framework.

Events

Events were found to be crucial for cities in the literature review and they were also important for the millennial audience. Richards & Wilson (2004) found that culture and arts were major components that both residents and visitors valued in the city.

Events are a means of forming strong connections to places (Kotler & Gertner, 2002), which was also visible in the empirical research, as the interviewees connected like Kuopio Wine Festival with the city of Kuopio. However, events were in the less mentioned subjects about cities and their brands. Culture, happenings and buzz on the streets in the city was, on the other hand, a very highly appraised factor mentioned by almost each interviewee. Events enhance and enrich the culture of the city (Zukin, 1995, cited in Richards & Wilson, 2004), implying that events are a viable method of city branding. Richard and Wilson (2004) found that events add life to the city, which was also one of the most appreciated pull factor in cities and a factor which was found to contribute to the attractiveness of the cities in the empirical research in this thesis. Events were found to improve the visibility and awareness of the city as seen in the conceptual framework too. However, events were not found to have an effect on the intentions to move to a certain place, on contrary to the conceptual framework.

Residents

Residents was a major group affecting the perceptions about cities, the social personality and warmth were one of the most appraised characteristics of the people living in Kuopio. Warmth and openness and other characteristics of the people residing in the city affect the success of the city brand (Anholt, 2006), which was also seen in the empirical research. For majority of the interviewees, the positive thoughts of the nice people were one of the first things coming to mind about Kuopio, affecting the perceptions of the city positively.

Using celebrities and famous people as brand ambassadors for the city is another successful means of building a city's brand (Braun et al., 2013). The interviewees associated famous artists with the city of Rovaniemi's brand and thought what made the city's brand so strong was partly due to those associations, indicating that famous people can indeed build a strong image to a city and increase its visibility. Residents are the most important city brand marketers (Kavaratzis, 2004), which was another factor found to hold true in the primary research. All the interviewees highlighted the fact of gaining most of their knowledge on cities from their friends, another insight found in the literature review as well.

City Marketing Toolbox

As Hospers (2004) stated, known cities are seen as more attractive, which was also the case with the millennial interviewees.

The city brand is affected how the city is featured in the media (Anholt, 2004a), and the millennial interviewees also highlighted how news affect their perceptions on the cities. Media strategies can be a major component changing people's images about cities (Tzou and Wang, 2013) and the millennial interviewees also thought social media and exposure to different cities help change their attitudes and intentions about visiting cities. The more they see a city online in different medias in the form of pictures, videos or posts, the more they want to visit the city, suggesting the viability of digital marketing tactics.

Visual parts of the city brand such as the city's logo, slogan and name are big players in communicating about the city and forming perceptions of the city, its identity and features, changing these components could help improve the city's image (Avraham, 2004). However, millennials did not mention logos or slogans, other than Oulu's slogan "The capital of Northern Scandinavia, indicating that slogans and logos are not as powerful as real tangible parts of the city, but well marketed, international and creative slogans like Oulu's are what stay in mind. Creativity and innovativeness in the city's marketing tactics was what was highly appreciated by the millennial audience.

Consistency was another success factor in cities' media strategies (e.g. Kavaratzis, 2004; Braun & Zenker, 2010) and was also highlighted by millennials, as they regarded London's and New York's marketing very successful, as it was consistent and everyone knows what it is like in the cities even if they have never visited them.

Digital marketing is an effective way to target and reach millennials (Smith, 2012) which was another factor highlighted in the empirical research. The interviewees use many social medias, and Instagram, Facebook and Snapchat were among the most used. Snapchat geofilters were a surprising insight found to affect people's perceptions about cities and were among the things that come to mind first about cities. Instagram and blogs were another social media channels through which millennials get information about cities. Sponsored posts were not liked and authentic content was appraised

more positively. Facebook was another social media mentioned, where shared content was found to influence millennials. Majority of the interviewees mentioned the importance of visual appearance in social media marketing, which was also found by Park and Gretzel (2007).

Majority of the interviewees in the empirical research had never visited a city website and cities websites were regarded as complicated, difficult to use and difficult to find information from. Park and Gretzel (2007) also found that ease of use and navigation were very important in city websites for millennials. Online forums and social media with other people and consumers were preferred over city websites, further highlighting the importance of word-of-mouth communication in city marketing.

Millennials consider peer opinions as more credible than traditional advertising (Smith, 2012), seen also in the interviews. The millennials had gained most of their information on cities from their friends and from student events and organizations.

Services and Connections

Local companies and services were very important in cities for the millennial interviewees. Location of cities was also one of the most highlighted components of cities, mentioned by majority of the interviewees and connections to other cities was considered even more important. The importance of providing good basic services and infrastructure and having good transportation connections into and out of the city are city brand components often stressed by scholars (e.g. Rainisto, 2003; Kavaratzis, 2004). Health care, services like shops and their flexible opening hours, public transportation and transportation to other cities were one of the most appraised factors in the empirical research in this thesis as well. Having an airport and regular and affordable flights to other cities were considered crucial and other connections and ease of travelling to other cities was crucial in the millennials' point of view. Tram was appraised as the best way to get around in a city. The insight of connection and transportation was mentioned even as a crucial factor which affects the considerations about moving to a city.

Study and Career Opportunities

Most of the interviewees were students and thus they were familiar with the universities and study opportunities in Kuopio and other cities. Anholt (2006) found that it is important for a city to provide educational services like universities and institutions and it was also found to be a crucial factor affecting the millennial perceptions on cities in the empirical research. Majority of the millennials mentioned universities, student events and student life about things which they know and like about certain cities, suggesting that study opportunities and students in a city are major factors building a positive city brand image and spreading information.

Mahroun (2000) found that students seem to be pulled by from one city to another by post-education opportunities and business friendly atmosphere. This held true also in the empirical research, as majority of the interviewees mentioned having good, innovative and supportive business climate and business opportunities crucial components in the city. Having enough jobs and interesting career opportunities was one of the most mentioned factors when asking the interviewees about pull factors of cities.

Development and Internationality

Another aspect loosely discussed in the literature review was the development and internationality. The international status and vibrant lifestyle of the city affect the success of the city brand (Anholt, 2006) and this was found also in the empirical research in this thesis. Millennials thought diversity, different ethnicities and internationality in cities was one of the most attractive factors in cities and they regarded it as an essential characteristic in their future hometown. International atmosphere and innovative development of cities was found to increase the attractiveness of the cities and also to affect the intentions of moving to cities.

6.1. Limitations of the Research

This study has some limitations. Firstly, due to limited time and other resources, the number of interviewees was relatively small. As a result of relatively few answers, the results cannot be generalized to the whole population of millennials everywhere in the

world. Second, the interviews were conducted in Finnish and later the answers were translated into English and thus some translation errors might have occurred. Finnish was used in order for the interviewees to explain and express their thoughts in the most natural way possible. Third, although almost all the respondents have some experience on living abroad, the respondents were all of Finnish nationality, all the respondents are between the ages 20-27 and the majority of the respondents are business students in the Aalto University School of Business, making the sample rather homogeneous. Thus the answers might not hold true to more heterogeneous and international population and the research should be replicated with different and more diverse people in order to get more generalizable insights.

7. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this thesis was to explore the success factors of city brands as well as millennial perceptions towards the city of Kuopio and cities in general. The methods used in this thesis include the secondary research conducted in the form of a literature review in the first part of the thesis and then the primary research conducted in the form of qualitative interviews with millennials. The results of this thesis indicate the successful components and pull factors of city brands and suggest ways in which to improve and build the city brand to be more attractive for the millennial audience.

7.1. Main Findings

Overall, millennials in this thesis considered the brand image of Kuopio as positive. Millennials were found to appreciate intentionality and development in cities. The more they had heard about a city from friends or seen about it in medias, the more attractive it was considered to be. Culture, career opportunities, business, buzz, international atmosphere, visual appearance and personality of the city were highly appraised aspects. Millennials get most of their information on cities from their friends and through student events. Social media is a big player in influencing perceptions on cities too. Millennials like an innovative and developing business climate in the city, which offers opportunities for building their career, appreciate good service offerings and

transportation connections in the city and into and out of the city. Helsinki, New York, London, Copenhagen, Berlin, Tampere, Porvoo, Oulu and Rovaniemi were thought as interesting and appealing cities with attractive brands and marketing.

7.2. Implications for International Business

This section will first introduce recommendations and managerial implications for the city management of Kuopio on how to improve their brand and marketing. Next, this section will introduce branding and marketing recommendations for cities in general in Finland and abroad to build an attractive brand and catch the eye of the millennial audience. This section will introduce managerial implications for city brand managements to develop and market the cities for millennials internationally.

7.2.1. Recommendations for Kuopio

Kuopio's image was regarded as positive, however, the city was very unknown for many of the interviewees, suggesting that Kuopio should aim at increasing visibility in different channels. Kuopio's city brand management should focus on emphasizing the nature, student life and friendly people in its marketing for millennials and build its brand around those, as they were the most appreciated components of Kuopio and cities in general.

Awareness of Kuopio was quite low and it should be improved in order to make the city more attractive and known. This should be done by improving the city's social media presence and visibility especially on Snapchat, Instagram and Facebook. However, as millennials appreciate authentic material, social media channels should aim at spreading real opinions and experiences through bloggers and other influencers, as these highly influential people add visibility to places and thus can increase the attractiveness of them too. Also, as people in cities are very important in shaping opinions on cities, emphasizing the people of Kuopio in the city's marketing and social media could be a highly successful marketing tactic. The Kuopio brand management should aim at embracing and increasing the internationality and diversity in the city by attracting foreigners and emphasizing internationality in the city's marketing tactics

online. To appeal to millennials and stand out from the crowd in social media, creative marketing tactics should be implemented.

Nature, especially water, would be an important component of urban planning. Urban planning should also aim at building personality, visual attractiveness and uniqueness to the city by the architecture and buildings, which is appreciated by millennials. Culture and history should also be emphasized in the architecture and reconstruction to build a distinctive ambiance in the city. As the first impressions of the city are important, Kuopio's city brand management should focus on the visual appearance of its bus and train stations which were not found very attractive for visitors.

Arranging and supporting unique student events could be an effective way to increase awareness of Kuopio for the millennial audience and make future professionals experience the city in a fun way. The city of Kuopio should associate itself even more with the University of Eastern Finland and brand itself to millennials through that, as university associations are very important for the young professionals and they encounter other students and student organizations in their daily life. Students in Kuopio are one of the big builders of the Kuopio brand for other students in different cities and thus the importance of student events and students' word-of-mouth communication should not be ignored.

Kuopio should also increase its reputation as a business city where to build a career to attract highly skilled professionals by having recruitment fairs and other job related events as well as market them broadly. Emphasizing partnerships with local companies and big recruiters could be another highly successful way in which to build Kuopio's brand as a business center. As the start-up scene is very attractive right now and many future business professionals would like to work for one or start their own in the future, this could be one aspect which to emphasize in the marketing. It would also be important to take the practical side into account in the policy making and make the circumstances for appealing for companies when wanting to attract innovative entrepreneurs.

Public transportation could be improved to make it more functioning and easier to use for people coming from outside the city by providing instructions and guides for visitors. The city of Kuopio could try to build a biking culture in the city, as it is a transportation

method appreciated by environmentally conscious millennials. The connections to other cities should be improved and marketed better, to improve awareness of them.

7.2.2. Recommendations for Cities in General

Internationality, development, study and career opportunities, services, connections and the general atmosphere were the most appraised factors in cities and thus those should be emphasized in both city brand marketing as well as in policy making activities.

City brand managers should emphasize the international atmosphere in the city, as that is very important for the mobile millennials. Events can be a great way to add life and buzz to the city, so enhancing the event and cultural offerings in the city could be one way in which to catch the eye of millennials. Student events especially would target the millennial audience effectively and could be a unique and personal way to experience the city. Branding through the university in the city could be useful as well, as millennials get a lot of information on cities through student organizations and universities and other students are a major way in which millennials get information on cities. Cities could gain more millennial interest by arranging different student events and for example, recruitment fairs. Cities should be marketed as plausible places where to build a career and thus partnerships with local companies should be considered and made more visible. Policy making should be made supportive for entrepreneurs and start-ups as an attractive business climate is a way to make innovative business professionals interested in the city.

In urban planning, water should be emphasized, as it was found to be the most important element for the millennial audience. Architecture should be made visually pleasing and distinctive and culture should be built to bring the city a personality. Along with having modern architecture and buzz in the city, having safe neighborhoods with good connections is another factor which is attractive for millennials when starting families. However, old architecture with unique character and history is appreciated and that should be kept in mind when reconstructing areas and buildings as that creates the distinctive identity and atmosphere for the city with which to compete and which is very important for millennials. Also, the city should have the brand identity

visible from the first moments of people arriving in the city at the airport or central station, as that is another factor shaping the whole visit and image of the city.

Ease of use of the public transportation was considered to be a crucial factor for millennials and thus it should be made simple to use and well-functioning. The biking culture of cities like Amsterdam and Copenhagen is also appreciated along with environmental consciousness and thus cities should offer different transportation methods, bikes being one.

Although the concrete features of the city are considered to be very important, the city brand management should also market them in a distinctive and visible way so that the audience is aware of the benefits the city offers. City marketing toolbox should indeed include social media marketing tactics on channels like Instagram, Facebook and Snapchat along with creative and new marketing ideas to catch the millennials' eyes. Especially the visual appearance of the city's geofilters was a surprising, but effective marketing tool, shaping the perceptions and knowledge on cities. For example, for highly digitalized millennials city apps could be a great way to increase knowledge on cities and improve the overall image of them. Word-of-mouth was found to be the most important and effective way of gaining knowledge on cities and thus it should be tried to influence positively by recruiting residents as brand ambassadors and trying to maximize the positive word-of-mouth communication and trying to get people to experience the city by themselves in a fun way.

7.3. Suggestions for Future Research

Further research on city brands could be done on different city brands in Finland and abroad. Research with millennials with more international experience or millennials from different countries could be fascinating. Also, comparing and contrasting differences between perceptions of city brands of different generations would also be an interesting field of study. The identified success factors of city brands could be researched more in depth to find out how exactly do events, jobs, services, residents, local authorities and urban planning contribute to the city brand image positively or instead, negatively. Another very interesting field of study would be how the way in

which people experience the city affect their perceptions on cities and to compare how the point of view affect the perceptions people have on cities. A crucial field of study would be city marketing channels and their effectiveness for different audiences to dig deeper and out which channel and what type of content are the most important players in catching the audience's eye.

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APPENDICES

Interview Questions:

1. Have you ever been in Kuopio?
2. What do you think of Kuopio?
3. What do you know about Kuopio?
4. What comes to mind when you think of Kuopio?
5. Which three adjectives would you use to describe Kuopio?
6. What is positive about Kuopio, what is negative about Kuopio?
7. Would you ever consider moving to Kuopio, why/why not?
8. If you have lived in Kuopio, what were the reasons you moved out?
9. What do you look for in a city, for example, your future hometown? What are the most important pull factors for you that could make you move to a certain city?
10. How have you heard about cities? Which are the most relevant channels according to you? (E.g. some social media, word-of-mouth/recommendations/experiences from friends?)
11. Where would you move in Finland or abroad? What are the most attractive cities to you, why?
12. A city which has a good brand according to you? Why?